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THE FARMER AND EDUCATION*

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IN the complex of questions that constitute the so-called "rural problem" there is no more important one to be met in the immediate future than that of developing better schools in the farming communities. During the past generation educational facilities have been developed in cities and villages that are of such character that the boys and girls living on farms are placed at a marked disadvantage in their efforts to secure an education. It is a matter of little moment whether or not the country school of today is better than it was twenty-five or fifty years ago. It is a matter of far reaching importance that the urban centers of our country have completely outstripped the rural communities in providing educational facilities. In the past one of the vital elements of strength in this country has been the free movement of population from the country to the city. This cannot be continued if the marked disparity that now exists between educational facilities of country and city is allowed to persist. This country could make no greater mistake than to tolerate rural schools of such poor quality that it will not be possible for the rural child to leave the country for the city without handicap providing he finds there the opportunity for the greatest social service. A mistake quite as serious would be to develop a system of rural education that would blindly turn the country boy or girl back to the farm. What is needed is a system of education that will give life in the open country a fair view in the eyes of the country child. Most of the demands for a system of rural education that shall keep people on the farm comes from persons who are thinking of the country only as a source of cheap food. In the past our country population has contributed a notable number of men and women who have become leaders in city and national affairs. Let us hope that this condition may continue to exist. It will not, however, unless better schools are developed in our rural communities.

There is no single remedy for the backward condition of rural education. There are some things that will do much toward giving the country child the educational opportunity to which he is entitled as a future citizen of any commonwealth in the United States. Among the most important of these is more adequate high school privileges. We should take as

our aim the possibilities of a high school education for every farm boy and girl near enough at hand so that he or she may stay under the parental roof at night. The problems relating to life in the open country that are pressing for solution are increasing in numbers and complexity. There is great need for clear thinking backed by a broad background on the part of the farmer. To meet these demands we must have a much larger proportion of our rural population made up of people who have had the benefits of a high school education.

There is also need for considerable change in what is taught in our high schools. These institutions are too much under the influence of college entrance requirements. They should of course have college preparation as a purpose but today they are dominated too largely by that function when consideration is given to the percentage of their following that goes to higher institutions of learning. The report of the United States Commissioner of Education shows that the proportion of the pupil-time that is devoted to the more formal subjects such as foreign languages, mathematics, and ancient history is very great. This condition obtains in spite of the fact that the content of these courses is not fundamentally related to the demands of life for most of those students who attend high school, nor is the thinking which it demands closely related to their needs in life. Relatively more emphasis should be placed upon the social, biological and economic sciences for the majority of students. There should also be more attention given to the vocational aspects for both boys and girls. This does not mean that these schools are to be interpreted as being only institutions for vocational training, any more than that they should be only college preparatory. It simply means a greater degree of democracy in secondary education by endeavoring to approach equality of opportunity for the group of students that these institutions serve. The farmer believes in these changes but the greatest barrier that stands in the way of their accomplishment is the teaching profession.

Those responsible for high schools should realize that they are only half measuring up to their opportunity so long as they continue to think only in terms of a school year of nine or ten months and a four year curriculum. Our rural high schools have a wonderful opportunity to become the centers of intel-

* Substance of an address at the North Carolina Teachers' Assembly, Asheville, November 26.

lectual life of their communities but to realize on this opportunity they will have to minister to the needs of the farmer in a much greater measure than they do at present. They must be made genuine community schools.

Every child whether he lives in country or city is entitled to a competent teacher. The facts that are gradually being brought together show that throughout the country in general the education of the farmers' children is in the hands of the least well trained, most immature, and least experienced group of our teaching population. It is futile to talk of equality of opportunity for the farm boy or girl so long as this condition obtains. This condition obtains in spite of the fact that the country school presents the most difficult teaching situation that exists in our school system. This situation must be recognized and the compensation connected with this service must be made great enough so that many of the most capable teachers will seek our rural schools. The financial returns must be great enough so that such persons will teach in the rural schools in spite of the handicaps of such service. In addition definite steps should be taken immediately throughout the country to prepare for service in the rural schools.

Closely related to the teaching problem is that of supervision of our country schools. This body of relatively inexperienced teachers is placed in the most difficult of teaching positions and given the least and, in general, the poorest supervision of any part of the teaching population. We must believe enough in the value of supervision and needs of the rural school so that large numbers of able men and women will see not only a field for service in rural school supervision, but adequate compensation provided and tenure of office made such that they will definitely prepare themselves for this field of the educational endeavor. The office should be put on a strictly professional plane.

To secure the necessary educational facilities for the rural communities will mean a much greater expenditure of money on country schools than is being put into them at present. The state must bear a much larger proportion of this expense than it now provides. How great this should be cannot be answered off hand. It should probably be not far from seventy-five percent of the total cost of the school support. The State is an organism and it can never reach its greatest strength in a democracy so long as any considerable group of its population has inferior educational faculties. We should recognize the fact that the scattered population of the open country makes the development of schools expensive and the State as a whole must participate in bearing this burden.

There is a general need for a recognition of the importance of the rural school problem. In our educational institutions at present the departments, schools, and colleges, of education confine their attention almost exclusively to the problems of education as they are found under urban conditions. These institutions should at once turn some of their energy to a study of the problems of education in the rural field. We are unable to give adequate answers to many of these questions because of the lack of facts. There is a need for a large amount of thorough study in this field. These institutions interested in education should accompany this investigation with the training of leaders for service in the field of rural education as they are now preparing for service in urban school systems. The farmer is coming to believe in the expert and he will demand his services in the field of education as he is asking it in other lines.

In conclusion may I urge all of you that in the reorganization that now seems at hand in North Carolina full consideration be given to farmers' needs in the field of education. This is not a problem of city versus country. It is a question of the welfare of the whole State and those living in cities should be just as vitally interested in seeing that the country child has equal opportunity with the child in village or city to secure an education.

Entrance salary for high-school teachers in the Canal Zone is \$152.72 a month, with increase of \$10 per month for each year of satisfactory service until the maximum of 199.72 has been reached. Grade-school teachers receive \$140.27 upon entrance, with increase of \$66 per month for each year of satisfactory service until the maximum of \$160.27 has been reached.

Quarters are furnished to teachers without charge. It is customary for the teachers in each town to employ a cook and form a "mess." With this arrangement the average living expenses are from \$25 to \$30 a month.

Twelve million school days are lost every year on account of measles. Nearly 230,000 children under one year die each year. Nine labor days are lost through sickness by the average working man every year. Every fifteen seconds a human being is injured; every fifteen minutes one is killed. Two and one-half million soldiers were rejected in our first draft. Switzerland requires her school children to be in the open air at least ten minutes of every school hour. There is enough fresh air and sunshine for all. Get all of yours!—*Wisconsin Journal of Education*.